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EDUCATIONAL IDEALS OF
BLESSED JULIE BILLIART

THE EDUCATIONAL IDEALS OF BLESSED JULIE BILLIART

*Foundress of the Congregation of
The Sisters of Notre Dame of Namur*

BY A MEMBER
OF HER
CONGREGATION

Translated from the French



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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

THE original of this little book, "Les Idées Pédagogiques de la Bienheureuse Mère Julie Billiard," is one of a series of studies of Founders and Foundresses of religious orders devoted to teaching, edited by M. Halcant, and published by P. Lethielleux, *Libraire-Éditeur*, 10 Rue Cassette, Paris. This translation is offered to English-speaking Catholic teachers, who are labouring, as Blessed Julie did, in the vineyard of "the good God," as a testimony to her work both as a teacher and as a trainer of teachers.

Her burning words of faith and wisdom on the all-important subject of the Christian education of Christ's little ones, though addressed to her own Sisters, and applicable to her own times, still ring true and strike home, even after the lapse of a century.

May they prove a stimulus, an encouragement, and a guide to Catholic teachers of our own day !

S. N. D.

NOTRE DAME,

DOWANHILL. 23rd October 1921

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

	PAGE
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	9

CHAPTER II

BLESSED JULIE'S VIEWS ON TEACHING	18
---	----

CHAPTER III

THE WORK OF BLESSED JULIE	54
-------------------------------------	----

BIBLIOGRAPHY	60
------------------------	----

THE EDUCATIONAL IDEALS OF BLESSED JULIE BILLIART

CHAPTER I

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

SOMEWHERE about the year 1758, a stranger, happening to pass through the little village of Cuvilly, in the diocese of Beauvais, could not have failed to notice, near a humble dwelling in the rue de Lataule, a little group of village children who appeared to be playing at school. The scholars, little ones, perhaps seven or eight years old, listened with unwonted seriousness and interest to their mistress, a bright, intelligent child of their own age, and it was by means of a Catechism lesson that this dear little teacher kept her youthful audience spell-bound !

The child
catechist.

In this childish scene lay concealed the germ of one of the most fruitful of the teaching institutions which were founded at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The young village girl, whose precocious gravity held sway over this turbulent little crowd, was no other than Julie Billiart, the future Foundress of the Congregation of the Sisters of Notre Dame of Namur, that "brilliant star in the sky of France in the eighteenth century," as she is called in the decree of Beatification which raised her to our altars.

In our day, when a child shows special aptitude for teaching, there are many wise advisers to counsel the parents: "Put your little girl into the teaching profession and she will make her mark in it." But Julie's family was

The school
of suffering.

Educational Ideals of

poor, her parents needed her assistance too much to allow their little daughter to carry on her own studies. God reserved to Himself the formation of this child of predilection in the hard school in which He fashions all the saints—the School of Suffering.

Born on the 12th July 1751, at Cuvilly, a village not many miles from Compiègne, Marie Rose Julie Billiard early gave promise of what she was one day to be—a great saint and an incomparable educator. At the village school she learnt only to read and write, for while still young she was obliged to work, because of the serious reverses of fortune by which her parents were tried. But her intelligence developed unaided, and, later on, this humble peasant was remarkable for that superiority of mind, and that distinction of manners and speech, which is not conferred by learning alone, but inspired above all by nobility of heart. Her study of Christian doctrine was never interrupted, and her greatest happiness was to speak of “the good God” to the village children, which she did with marvellous lucidity and unction. In this work of teaching Catechism, which was to be that of her whole life, Julie’s predilection was ever for the most abandoned. At one time she instructed a little beggar boy, and put him in the way of earning an honest livelihood as a pedlar. As she grew up she still carried on this office of catechist, instructing the harvesters while she was sharing their hard work in order to help her impoverished parents. Such was the charm of her pious lessons that these good people would willingly have assembled, even on Sundays, to listen to their captivating teacher.

A fresh trial was to deprive Julie of the consolation of helping her afflicted family. In 1774 an attempt was made on the life of her father, and the shock so completely broke down her delicate constitution, already undermined by hard work, that she could with

Blessed Julie Billiart

difficulty drag herself about on crutches, and she was soon a complete cripple, stretched on a bed of suffering. This trial was to continue for twenty-two years ! To souls less spiritual-minded than the pious invalid this would have seemed to be an end to her vocation as a teacher, but Julie saw with the eyes of faith. Gathering together the little ones of the village around her couch, she continued to explain to them the truths of the Christian religion, and to instil into them the love of virtue.

Then came the Revolution of 1789, when Julie's reputation for sanctity singled her out as a victim for the fury of the revolutionaries. The revolution of 1789. Indeed, it was only by a divine and almost miraculous protection, and at the cost of much suffering, that she escaped their pursuit. It was at this time that God revealed to her in a prophetic vision the great designs which He destined her to accomplish. Showing her, grouped around the Cross on Calvary, a vast number of religious :

"These," He told her, "are the daughters, whom I give you, in the Institute which will be signed with My Cross and designed for the education of youth." However impossible of realization this prediction must then have appeared to Julie, she believed God's word, and accepted beforehand all the labours and sufferings inseparable from such a work.

In 1794 the Countess Baudoin, one of her protectresses from Cuvilly, took apartments in the house of the Viscount Blin de Bourdon Mdlle Blin de Bourdon. at Amiens. Here she also procured a room for her protégée. Thus Providence conducted Julie into the very house of her future first associate and co-foundress of the Institute of the Sisters of Notre Dame, Mademoiselle Blin de Bourdon, known later under the religious name of Mère St Joseph. This young girl had been imprisoned at Amiens during the

Educational Ideals of

revolutionary outbreak, and had escaped the guillotine only by the fall of Robespierre. She was living a life entirely devoted to good works. When Madame Baudoin introduced her to her dear invalid, there grew up between these two kindred souls a deep and holy friendship, upon which time never wrought any change. Soon after their providential meeting, Julie and her pious companion, directed by the Rev. Father Varin, Superior of the Fathers of the Faith, laid the foundations of their work, gathering together a few poor neglected orphans. It was not long before the two Foundresses were joined by several companions, and the exercises of regular religious life were begun.

On the 2nd February 1804 Julie Billiart, Françoise Blin, and Catherine Duchatel pronounced their first vows of religion, adding thereto that of devoting all their powers to the Christian education of young girls. The first work which they undertook was to assist the Fathers of the Faith in their missions. These great missions were the means adopted at the beginning of the nineteenth century for the building up of France after the ravages of the Revolution. At Amiens, at St Valery sur Somme, and at Abbeville the Sisters were entrusted with the instruction of the women of the congregation, and they accomplished their task with truly apostolic zeal.

Mère Julie was still an invalid, but God judged the trial sufficiently prolonged, and in June 1804, during the course of a novena to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, He miraculously restored her to health. The valiant Foundress desired this favour only in order to devote herself to the greater glory of God.

"My God," she said, with absolute self-sacrifice, "if you do not want to make use of me to win souls for you, give me back my infirmities."

Blessed Julie Billiart

Julie was then fifty-three years of age. During the twelve years which she was still to pass on earth, her life was to be one prodigious expenditure of activity. In order to establish schools at Ghent, Namur, Bordeaux, Saint-Hubert, Liège, Breda, and many other places, in fact wherever the Bishops asked for the services of her newly-founded Institute, Mère Julie never hesitated to make long and difficult journeys by uncomfortable stage-coaches, by riding on a donkey, or often even on foot.

This indefatigable labourer in the vineyard of "the good God" counted as nothing fatigues and difficulties of all kinds when there was question of securing the inestimable benefit of Christian education for the little ones of Christ. But with characteristic prudence she was desirous, in the first instance, to give her daughters time and opportunity to fit themselves for their mission as teachers. Two years were devoted to this work of real formation, and the first classes for the poor little girls of the locality were opened at Amiens in 1806. On the first day over sixty children presented themselves, and the numbers were well maintained. Shortly after this, at the request of Mgr. Fallot de Beaumont, Bishop of Ghent, a branch house was founded in the little town of Saint Nicholas, in the district between Ghent and Antwerp, known as Pays de Waes.

Spread of
the work.

The Bishop of Namur, Mgr. Pisani de la Gaude, in his turn, expressed a wish to have Sisters to teach the children of his diocese. This foundation, which was eventually to prove the most important, was made in 1807. An imperial decree, which sanctioned the Congregation of the Sisters of Notre Dame in 1806, gave Mère Julie the right to send her religious school-mistresses far and wide.

Educational Ideals of

But all divine undertakings must be signed with the seal of the Cross, and so it was with the rising Institute. To provide for the future development of the Congregation, Father Varin had wished that it should be governed by a Superior General entrusted with the visiting of the houses, the appointment of local Superiors, and the spiritual and temporal cares of the Association. Mère Julie had been elected, by unanimous consent, the first Superior General. When Father Varin was obliged to leave Amiens, he appointed as confessor to the community Father de Sambucy de Saint Estève, "a priest still young," says Mgr. Baunard, in the life of Blessed Mère Barat, "enterprising and arbitrary in his ideas, a literary man of brilliant imagination, a restless genius and a lover of progress." This ecclesiastic, animated no doubt with the best intentions, but not grasping the spirit of the new Institute, wished to conform it to the model of the ancient monasteries. He would have no Superior General, no connection between the different houses, and the whole work was to be circumscribed within the limits of a single diocese. Unfortunately, he succeeded in bringing the Bishop of Amiens, Mgr. Demandolx, to his way of thinking.

The holy Foundress was spared nothing. Reproaches, humiliations, contradictions of all kinds were showered upon her. Calumnies, calculated to deprive her of the confidence of the Bishop and of the Sisters, were spread abroad. Finally, on the 12th January 1809, came a communication from the Bishop's house, informing her that she was free to withdraw into whatever diocese she wished, but that Monseigneur, desirous of forming true Sisters of Notre Dame, took back his house which he had rented to her. Mère Julie, without a murmur, bowed to the Divine Will manifested in this hard

Departure
from
Amiens.

Blessed Julie Billiard

decision of her Bishop, and set out for Namur, where Mgr. Pisani de la Gaude offered her generous hospitality. In spite of the efforts of the Abbé de Sambucy, all the Sisters, with the exception of two, followed their Mother.

At Namur God visibly blessed the goodwill of the "Dames Françaises," by which name the Sisters of Notre Dame were for a long time known in the town. The work of Julie Billiard from that time went on developing in Belgium, to spread from thence to England, America, and Africa. The prince-bishop, Maurice de Broglie, had just been appointed to the See of Ghent. After having seen Mère Julie he wished to become one of her patrons. He transferred the house in St Nicholas to his episcopal town and, as if inspired, said to the servant of God: "No, Mère Julie, you are not meant to remain in one diocese. Your vocation is to spread throughout the world."

Strengthened by this encouragement Julie pursued the work of foundations. After that of Ghent came successively those of Jumet, Saint-Hubert, Zèle, Gembloux, Andenne, and Fleurus. In fact, Julie Billiard could not meet all the requests from town councils and ecclesiastical authorities.

But already Monseigneur Demandolx, Bishop of Amiens, had repented of having expelled from his diocese the Sisters of Notre Dame, those zealous teachers of youth, directed by a woman whose fame for sanctity increased from day to day. In 1812 he honourably recalled Mère Julie and appointed her Superior General of the houses which she had before founded in his diocese. Julie thus went back to Amiens, where a few days sufficed to enable her to grasp the situation. The community, composed of new subjects, imbued with prejudices against the primitive spirit, was scarcely capable of being

Recall to
Amiens.

Educational Ideals of

reorganized. Besides, it had lost the confidence of the parents and was soon disbanded. The Final departure from France. neighbouring foundations were in like case. Most of the Sisters who directed them were reunited with those of Namur, and the Institute no longer had a single house in France, the land of its birth.

Having returned to Belgium the valiant Mother devoted all her time to visiting the houses and schools already existing, and to the formation of the Sisters as religious and as teachers. The greater number were young and inexperienced. She directed them by her wise counsel ; and her voluminous correspondence, religiously preserved in the Institute, testifies how far her motherly care followed them in their laborious missions.

In 1815 the invasion of Belgium by the French and Allied armies caused the courageous Saintly death, 1816. Foundress such an increase of work and anxiety that her health, already very much impaired, could no longer hold out. At first she devoted herself to tending the wounded, but soon her strength forsook her, and on the 12th January 1816 she was obliged to take to her bed, never again to rise from it. During three months God again made of her a "suffering victim," and on the 8th April, fortified by all the rites of religion, she crowned, by a most saintly death, a life entirely devoted to the service of God. The voice of the people immediately canonized her, and heaven having attested her virtue by striking miracles, the supreme Head of the Church in 1906 placed the crown of beatification upon the head of this humble peasant.

Julie Billiart seemed to be removed very prematurely from her work, but its foundations, which she had laid, were so solid, that she could sleep peacefully in the Lord without fear that the pious edifice would

Blessed Julie Billiart

fall to pieces. Besides, she left behind her, to sustain the growing Institute, the Reverend Mère Saint Joseph, her faithful assistant from its earliest days, and one who, formed in the School of Blessed Julie, was imbued with the same supernatural aims, the same zealous and devoted spirit. Appointed Superior General, Mère St Joseph carried on the undertaking so valiantly commenced, and by her wisdom and prudence succeeded, in spite of the harassing measures of William of Orange, King of the Netherlands, not only in maintaining the houses of education already existing, but also in founding new ones, whose increasing prosperity was a testimony to the blessing of God upon the work.

CHAPTER II

BLESSED JULIE'S VIEWS ON TEACHING

It is impossible to consider the work of Julie Billiart Education without being struck by the marked dis- primarily proportion between the means employed religious. and the results obtained. How did she, an uneducated peasant, conceive and carry into execution the project of founding a teaching Congregation ? From what source did this poor country girl, without even a complete primary education, obtain the ideas about teaching which abound in her letters ? To this question there is only one reply : " The finger of God is there." This work is above all a supernatural work. The humble Foundress herself was the first to recognize this, for numberless are the passages in her letters in which she attributes to God not only the success, but also the initiative, of her undertaking.

" Let us trust in the good God," she writes. " It is His work. I sometimes think that since the establishment of Christianity nothing so poor as ours in the way of an Institution has appeared. . . . I confide all that to the good God without troubling myself too much about it, because it is the good God who has made it. He will unmake it, if it so pleases Him."

To study the educational views of this servant of God, ignorant according to the world but enlightened from above, is to learn to recognize the thoughts of the saints on this most important question, which is exercising all serious minds at the present day. We shall, as far as possible, leave Mère Julie to speak

Blessed Julie Billiart

for herself. Her simple and artless language, un-inspired either by reading the Masters, or by systems of rhetoric, will best show her to us, with her frank countenance and her rare good sense, rising to the heights of principles, which bear the unmistakable seal of their divine origin.

Until God manifested His great designs to Julie the one idea of her ardent and zealous soul was to teach Catechism to children, "in order," as she said, "to rob the devil of much of his prey, to instil into them true religious principles, and to strive to gain them for the good God."

It is hardly necessary to remark that this supernatural outlook guided her also in the founding of her Institute. She had no other aim in view but "by education to train up Christian mothers and Christian families." And if she did establish schools in which secular subjects were taught, she did so only as the best means of accomplishing her heaven-sent mission and of getting hold of the children, in order "to rescue these little ones from the power of Satan, and to teach them the value of their souls."

There is one phrase which recurs constantly, like a refrain, throughout the letters and familiar conferences, and even the conversation, of Blessed Julie, a phrase which reveals to us the secret of her apostolate, and which sums up the constant preoccupation of her mind, and the ruling desires of her heart :

"Ah ! how good is the good God !"

This characteristic motto, now to be found on all her statues and pictures, sufficiently explains the whole life of the Foundress of the Sisters of Notre Dame. The one aim of Mère Julie's life was to love, and to bring others to love, this God, whom she herself knew to be so good. And in order to win souls for Him, she was good to all, but especially to children—good like "the good God" Himself.

Educational Ideals of

At the period when Julie laid the foundations of her work, that is to say, immediately after the Revolution of 1789, there was practically no education in France, especially among the lower classes. Official primary schools did not yet exist. The project of establishing them had, it is true, been conceived and seriously considered by the National Convention. Although, however, this Assembly had discussed at considerable length the organization of public instruction and the establishment of schools open to all classes, and had even passed a very promising Education Act, as a matter of fact the practical results of it all were negligible. The Act of the 3rd Brumaire, of the 4th year (24th October 1795), decreed the establishment of primary schools, but in reality only secondary and higher education was dealt with. In the towns, children who could pay for their schooling could find teachers who made their living in this way. But except in a very few places where there were free classes on week-days, the only means of education open to the poor were the Sunday schools established by the Church. Free instruction was a thing not yet thought of, and we find in the text of the Act previously mentioned, under the heading "Primary Schools," the following articles which indicate the mentality of that time on the subject :—

Article 8. Primary teachers shall receive from each of their pupils a yearly remuneration, which shall be fixed by the administration of the Department.

Article 9. For reasons of poverty, a fourth of the pupils of each primary school may be exempted by the municipal authorities from the remuneration.

Poor children grew up in the most complete ignorance, especially with regard to religion :

"You cannot form an idea," wrote Mère Julie in 1810, "of the dirt and ignorance of these poor children. They are without underclothing, without everything.

Blessed Julie Billiart

. . . There are some who made their first Communion two years ago, and who no longer know that there is a God."

To combat these evils Mère Julie founded her Institute. At the outset she would have none but the poor as pupils. It was not that she was unmindful of the lot of other children, to whom later she opened paying day schools and boarding schools, but it seemed to her that it was the poor, above all, who lacked food for their intellect and their heart, which was no less necessary than for their bodies.

At first designed only for the poor.

After the foundation of the house at Montdidier the Sisters, yielding to the pressure of the parents, had received a few paying pupils. As soon as Mère Julie heard of it she wrote to the Superior :

"I beg of you again not to receive any but the poor—poor little children who cannot pay anything. Gather together as many of them as you can. We are for the poor only, absolutely for them only. If fees have been taken by anyone, it was quite contrary to my wishes. . . .

"Be careful then to do what I tell you for the poor little girls ; let them be our treasure."

We read in another letter, dated from Ghent :

"Our arrival in this quarter has caused great alarm to a boarding-school already established here. . . . Monseigneur reassured them, however, by telling them that we were for the poor only. From that instant all fears were set at rest. No one will be jealous of our happiness in that line."

"My dear good Sister Ange," she wrote to a mistress in one of the poor schools, "how are you, in the midst of your 'treasures,' as St Lawrence, whose feast we celebrate to-day, would call them? You hold them in trust for the good God, my dear daughter.

Educational Ideals of

What an honour He does you! I would have congratulated you long before this, but that I was prevented by a journey to Paris, from which I have just returned."

A letter written by Julie to another of her daughters is addressed thus :

"To my dear daughter Scholastica, Sister of Notre Dame and Mistress of the poor members of our Lord Jesus Christ. What an honour! oh! my God, what a joy!"

"The classes of poor children," she loved to repeat, "ought to be the first and most important part of our flock. We can have houses without boarding schools, but we can never have any without free classes for the poor."

This regulation laid down by the saintly Foundress, is recorded in the rules of her Congregation, and has always been faithfully observed.

In order to establish schools Mère Julie needed mistresses sufficiently well educated themselves, and capable of educating the children entrusted to them. The young girls who presented themselves to her as postulants brought, no doubt, treasures of goodwill, but very little education, and no knowledge of teaching. As Blessed Julie said, they were "all young people to be rough-hewn, like the stones which are taken from a quarry." The courageous Foundress applied herself in the first instance to this work of formation. She attached to it so much importance, that she refused to make new foundations proposed to her, because her daughters were not sufficiently well trained, and that, in spite of the apostolic spirit which made her cry out :

"The country should be full of our houses! . . . There are no more priests. Our zeal should make us fly to instruct these poor children, so many of whom lie sunk in the most miserable ignorance." She was in

Blessed Julie Billiart

the habit of saying : " If we undertake the work in too great a hurry, the consequences will be serious."

Gifted with a talent for the teaching of catechism, which was quite beyond the ordinary, and truly supernatural, Julie herself would have wished, in some sense, to infuse the same into her future mistresses. She stimulated the zeal of the Sisters and showed them the best methods, giving model Catechism lessons to the children in their presence. She encouraged them by every possible means to work at their improvement, and her praise sufficiently rewarded their courageous efforts.

The
apostolate
of the
Catechism.

Each year she secured for her youthful mistresses a course of lectures on " Education " by the Rev. Fr. Thomas, a doctor of the Sorbonne, and a man fully qualified in the matter.

Julie was instant in her exhortations to all her Sisters, not only to those among them who had never taught, but also to those who were already exercising their office as mistresses in the schools, that they were in duty bound " to spare no effort, no trouble, in order to educate themselves thoroughly."

We glean from her correspondence the following passages :

" I have been more than satisfied with all the Sisters' letters and with their writing. The progress which they show is really most pleasing. Courage, my dear good daughters ! Make use of every moment that you have to improve yourselves. . . ."

" Try and secure as much free time as you can to get on with the studies which are useful, even necessary, for you. . . . I beg of you again, utilize to the utmost all your odd moments."

She wrote to a Superior : " You do a greater work in thoroughly forming one or two Sisters, than you would do, if you had a hundred boarders."

Educational Ideals of

The ardent zeal of the Foundress bore fruit. At Namur the Sisters vied with one another in their efforts. The timid, and those who found the pronounciation difficult, set themselves, like new Demosthenes, to overcome the difficulties by speaking aloud to the trees in the garden. Others again struggled to master the "patois" of the country, in order to adapt their explanations to the capacity of their pupils, who did not yet know French. Not satisfied with devoting to their studies every moment of the day, the merry evening recreation hour was also turned to good account for their mutual profit. The zealous Foundresses, with the object of keeping the Institute up to the standard of its mission, inserted in the rules this obligation of study and self-improvement as an essential duty of the Sisters of Notre Dame.

If Mère Julie expected of her daughters such eagerness for their own advancement in profane learning, which she looked upon merely "as nets to catch souls," how much more did she devote herself to the task of their moral training as religious teachers! She sought above all things to impress them with a profound understanding of the incomparable greatness of their vocation.

"When I see you engaged in this work," she used to say to them, "you seem to me far greater than all worldly potentates. . . . What are we that we should be made use of for the most important work which can be accomplished on earth—to labour for the salvation of souls! God alone understands the greatness of the work which is confided to us! . . . How do we know but that God has gathered us together here to gain for Him one single soul? And would it not be a great thing to be the means of salvation to one soul?—a soul which has cost the blood of a God!" "It is no small thing to have the guidance of souls,"

Blessed Julie Billiart

wrote Mère St Joseph some years later. "It is more than to rule worlds."

In Blessed Julie's eyes every human consideration disappeared before the primary importance of Christian education. Could the question of finance be so much as put in the balance with the good of souls? It was only out of consideration for the parents that the Foundress tolerated the acceptance of a small remuneration from the families who could afford it. If she had listened only to her apostolic spirit she would have received all the day scholars as free pupils. Still fearing that the school fees might prevent some of the pupils from attending the classes, she wrote to the Superior of a secondary house :

The
primary
importance
of
Christian
education.

"See, my dear daughter, if you think that a half crown (French money) a month is too much, you should lower it to two francs in order to make it easier for those who are willing to come and be instructed. . . . We must consider God's interests and the good of souls before our own. If any, who cannot pay the three francs, should present themselves, they must not be sent away, because religion is the only thing to be considered in these unhappy times in which we are living."

Mère Julie was no less disinterested when it was a question of boarding pupils. At the time of the opening of the boarding school at St Hubert she wrote to the Superior :

"You must not be too particular for the first year. Let the children get accustomed to coming to school, so that you may work more easily for their salvation and win their little hearts for the good God."

She was no more influenced in her work by the opinions of men than by the question of money. Let

Educational Ideals of

us hear how she encourages a Superior, struggling against opposition :

“ Let us not be faint-hearted. Leave people to say what they wish and to invent as many idle stories as they can, but do you place it all in our good Master’s hands. Men may say and do what they will against us. It is the good God who is our judge.”

Whilst the saintly Mother strove to put before her daughters all the beauty and sublimity of the work of education, she did not hide from them the responsibilities which such a mission entails nor the difficulties to be encountered therein.

Courage and self-sacrifice needed for the work.

“ If we have to thank the good God for sending us children to bring up, we must not forget that the responsibility increases with the numbers, for as religion teaches, the formation of young hearts is no small task. Oh ! how difficult it is to carry out that work well in these times.”

The lack of religion amongst the parents, the ignorance of the children, their irregularity at school, their want of respect and submission and their unruly conduct, were often a source of anxiety to the mistresses, making them fear that their devotedness was expended on barren soil. But in her spirit of faith Blessed Julie always found motives to sustain the courage of the young teachers.

How stimulating, for instance, were such words as these :

“ I am not surprised that you have not many children. You must get accustomed to that and do your duty just the same as if you had a full class. It is to your intention, rather than to your action, that the good God looks. Take courage then, numbers are nothing. To do our duty well as if there were hundreds—that is what the good God asks.”

“ Courage, my good daughter, when you are tempted

Blessed Julie Billiart

to despond and to think that your children are not all that you would wish them to be. . . . Perhaps the good God has sent you to N. for the sake of a single soul. . . . Oh ! my daughter, how far above ours are the thoughts of the good God. We should like to see abundant fruits, and it would certainly be desirable, but we are living at an unfavourable epoch. . . . We must pray very much for our dear children, that God may cause the good seed to spring up in their little hearts and to bear fruit. After all, *we* were not any better at their age."

"Children are not disciplined in a day. In time things will be better. You will see that consolations will come. I am sure of it. But do not be in a greater hurry than the good God : He is so patient with us all. Let us follow His example. . . . Beginnings are always very trying, but the good God will bring it all right by the help of His holy grace. 'But,' you will say to me, 'so few benefit by it !' What matter, let us go on sowing the good seed. 'Paul sows, Apollo waters, but it is God who gives the increase.'"

"I know quite well that it would be very satisfying to see the children profit by all that you teach them, but after all, let us do our best, and God will do the rest. Now, you see only their faults and the trouble that they give you, but have a little patience and you will see the fruit."

Whilst encouraging her daughters by the prospect of the good results of their labours, the saintly Mother did not allow them to forget that suffering is a necessary condition for accomplishing anything good. Answering a Superior who had written of her difficulties she said :

"Do you know, my good friend, that if your little house were not visited by crosses and trials, I should fear that it was not the good God's work ? That is the true mark by which we can identify it—contra-

Educational Ideals of

dictions, persecutions, humiliations, etc. etc. . . .
Ah! yes, my dear daughter! It must be signed with the seal of the Cross—crosses from self, crosses from others, crosses through the children—but crosses borne with love, with fidelity, with courage!”

This thought, which had its inspiration in the mysterious expiation on Calvary, is one of those which Mère Julie most repeatedly sought to instil into her teachers.

“You must give yourselves, spend yourselves, sacrifice yourselves sometimes, in expiation, to recover their innocence, for the young souls who may have lost it.”

“You must not be surprised at anything, nor fear those little faults, which are often only passing. Even if they do persist for some little time, accept them as a penance, very pleasing to God, which you can perform with your children. We often think that things are going well according to our notions, but God’s ways are different from ours. Let us put up with being sometimes provoked by these little ones, my daughter. They are instruments of penance with which the good God supplies us. They are most profitable to help us to gain heaven.”

“It is already a part of our reward, to suffer, in laying the foundations of a work.”

“To achieve anything good we must pay the price. Nothing for nothing. Oh! let us purchase heaven for ourselves and for others. Souls are not won without suffering.”

According to Mère Julie’s wise counsel, in the difficulties inherent in the vocation of a teacher, we must pray, rather than speak. The Christian schoolmistress must before all else be pious, but hers must be a piety which unites the soul to God, makes it lean on God only, work *for* God and always in His presence.

How repeatedly did the saintly Superior beg of her

Blssed Julie Billiart

Sisters great "fidelity to their spiritual exercises," in order to obtain from heaven the assistance necessary for their success in "the art of arts," as she called education.

"Remember all your life, that if you are not truly interior you will not be able to find God in the depths of your own heart. You may seem to yourself to have done a great deal for the welfare of the children committed to your care, but you will have made a noise, nothing more. A single word, spoken by an interior soul, is worth more than the longest sermons in the world."

"Every day of your life be sure that you commit your class to the good God as to its head. Realize your own importance for good, in the souls of the children, but grace must act. All we do is nothing, nothing at all, if the good God does not aid us."

"We must not be astonished if the children are still so disobedient and obstinate, and make so little progress. It is sometimes, in fact very often, the fault of the mistresses, because they are not sufficiently united to God."

"If you do not live in the presence of God your instruction will not carry grace to the souls of the children. You will do only an exterior work, which will bear no fruit for life eternal."

"For a work such as ours, ready-made saints are needed, whereas, *we*" (added the humble Superior) "are yet to be made saints."

Mère Julie regarded it as essential that the teacher should cultivate, first, in her own soul the solid virtues which she was required, ^{Formation} later, to instil into the souls of the children ^{of character.} committed to her care.

"Yes, solid virtue—solid virtue!" repeated the energetic Foundress, "without that it is all idle chatter."

Educational Ideals of

“ If you are not virtuous yourself, you will not make others so. One cannot give what one has not got, and the good God will not bless your work. Is it not virtue which gives the best education ? Virtue tends to make people sweet, affable, and amiable, more than the greatest learning can do.”

And what were the principal virtues which the saintly Mother wished to see in her schoolmistresses ? In the first place, strength of mind, firmness of character : “ Because those who are without character, although they may have many virtues, are not at all fit to direct others.”

“ How much I should wish,” she exclaims, “ to make this great truth known to all. Character ! character ! but that character which the good God gives, not what we make ourselves. Oh, say to my good Sisters that they must acquire a virile character ; that those whom the good God singles out for the instruction of others are justified in asking Him to give it to them. And He, like a good Father, will give it to them, whatever it may cost.”

“ If you but knew as I do, how the good God makes me experience that without this help from Him everything fails for ourselves and for others.”

“ Form your character,” she repeats, “ no matter what it costs your self-love, for, when the good God assigns a post to anyone, the spirit of Charity, which He puts into that soul, is always accompanied by firmness.”

“ It should never be said of a teacher that she is too lenient ; we live in an age when much strength of mind, much character is needed.”

But in order that this firmness may not degenerate into harshness, it must be impregnated with sweetness, kindness, and patience :

“ It is only the good God who can give this happy mean,” said Mère Julie. “ We must not allow natural

Blessed Julie Billiart

activity to carry us away in our desire for good. That is merely the effect of a lively imagination and soon spends itself."

"We must always begin with sweetness. That is the way in which the spirit of the good God acts. The Scripture says, that the good God accomplishes His ends with sweetness and strength. That is what we must do."

"Let us say things in a kind and gentle way, and not in a harsh tone, and let us not tire of repeating them often."

A teacher, according to Mère Julie, must be perfectly mistress of herself. To know how to combine sweetness and strength in reasonable proportions she must be on her guard against first impulses, especially if she is of a lively and energetic disposition.

Mère
Julie's ideal
of a
teacher.

"Oh! yes! That is my occupation," writes the holy Superior, in her humility, "to cling to the good God all the time, so that I may not say anything on the impulse of the moment. Energetic characters think, in their zeal, that they are working wonders. No! No! Only let us listen to the spirit of the good God, and we shall have good reason to change our opinion. . . . We should let our thoughts cool down before we express them."

Another qualification which Mère Julie required in the mistresses was a good temper.

"Gaiety without dissipation, in order to win all hearts."

"The joy of the Holy Spirit," she says, "must be graven in our countenance, to the glory of God, so that we may draw souls to His service."

She understands that it is very difficult to some natures to be courteous and condescending. She writes to one of her daughters, who seemed to her too reserved:—

"I know that each one has her own way. Stones are

Educational Ideals of

polished, wood is carved, cloth is embroidered. You see everything must be worked upon, our character most of all. When a person who is too gloomy is put in a position of authority over others, she tends to make the whole house sad and gloomy. I beg of you then to make a little effort to be more cheerful."

Again, according to Blessed Julie, a teacher must never lose sight of the important duty of good example ; she must by her regular life and exactitude in all her duties serve as a model to the children under her care.

"The sight of her must urge them on to virtue."

The following reproach, made by the vigilant Superior to one of her religious, shows how ardently she desired to see her mistresses tending to perfection even in their smallest actions :

"I see by your last letter that you wrote again in a hurry. The good God is a God of order. His children should love order in everything. . . . When I am writing to you, if my writing is not very good, I begin again, to punish myself. Whatever we do, we must do it well."

Mère Julie did not forget that in their vocation her daughters would have to labour together in the same work, and she pointed out to them how very necessary it was that they should agree if they were to succeed in the education of youth. She earnestly besought of them in their dealings with one another to be mutually helpful and courteous, and always ready to render little services when possible, and to be very respectful in their intercourse one with another. Writing to a Superior, she said :

"Never pass over a want of respect, for that is what leads to the destruction of charity in religious houses. I speak to all my daughters as I would speak to my Superior."

Faithful to their Mother's advice, and perfectly

Blessed Julie Billiard

united among themselves, the Sisters consulted together as to the best means of improving their teaching and shared the benefit of their past experience and knowledge, showing one another various kinds of needlework and other things, in order to contribute more effectually to the progress of their pupils and the salvation of souls. They thus multiplied their natural talents at the same time that they drew yet closer the bonds of sisterly charity.

This wise Superior, who never relaxed in her solicitude for the formation of the Sisters, was herself the model of an educator. She

Mère Julie
a model
educator.

truly had the gift of "bringing up" children in the best and most Christian acceptance of the term. Her influence on youth might be summed up simply by saying: She *loved* children. She loved with a supernatural and intelligent love, which was as tender as it was deep. For "her dear little girls," she had, as Fénelon says, "that which is most divine in love—a devotedness which forgets self, to spend itself without measure, and to give itself without reserve."

In spite of the many journeys, which the needs of her growing Institute made necessary, she never forgot her "dear little girls." Each letter contained a fresh assurance of her affection. Let us quote, at random, a few of those messages. They will give us some idea of the treasures of tenderness with which the hearts of saints overflow:

"I embrace all my little girls, whom I love very much. I am longing to see them again. How pleased I shall be to find that they have made progress in my absence! You will write and tell me if they are very good. Tell them all that I love them very much, that I would wish to have them all in heaven, that together we might bless the good God. He is so good, the good God."

Educational Ideals of

“ And my dear little girls, whom I so stupidly forgot in my last letter ! I embrace them so tenderly in Our Lord, that even at a distance of forty miles they must feel it. Oh ! yes, yes ! indeed, they are all in my heart, with my Jesus.”

“ I shall be delighted to see our dear children coming to meet me on Tuesday. I shall try to arrive early.”

Her “ little girls ” *felt* the depth and reality of her affection for them—childhood is never deceived in that respect—and they returned it whole-heartedly. They all loved their good Superior, were distressed at her prolonged absences, rejoiced when she came back and could refuse nothing to their “ Mother,” a title which the saint loved to hear on the lips of her children. One feels the joy which fills her heart as she writes one day :

“ All the little children in the town, who come to our school, call me their Mother.”

The testimony of former pupils, under oath, in the process for the Beatification of the Servant of God, is unanimous in praising her goodness. One declares that when she was a child she could not take her eyes off Blessed Julie, there was something so kind about her. Many years after her death several former pupils of the poor school used to love to speak of the joy it was to them when the kind and smiling Foundress went round to visit her children and questioned them in Catechism, rewarding those who answered well by giving them her Crucifix to kiss.

The saint loved to see all the children show their affection for her, not certainly for her own sake, but so that she might win their souls to God. We read in one of her letters :

“ Say to my little E. and to F. . . ” (two orphans brought up at Amiens) “ that their affection when I was leaving gave me great pleasure. The good God loves tender hearts, and certainly when they are

Blessed Julie Billiart

devoted to their Mother in God they will appreciate the graces which He bestows."

This real love which Blessed Julie had for her children gave her a kind of intuition of the best means to employ in order to ensure their present and future happiness. Her motherly solicitude for them included their whole person—body, mind, heart, and will. Physical training, as everyone knows, did not at the beginning of the nineteenth century occupy the important place in education which it does in our day. Nevertheless Mère Julie was much concerned for the temporal welfare of her dear little children. She wishes them to be well looked after in everything connected with the health of their bodies.

"Let the food be wholesome, the cooking well done, and above all give them good bread."

She considers this care of the children as "one of the first duties of a Superior." She writes :

"If you do not look after temporal things I shall always say that your piety cannot be genuine, for we are made up of soul and body, and both must be cared for. As St Francis says, our body is 'our beast of burden,' and without it the soul can do nothing."

Certain passages in the Saint's letters reveal to us how keenly alert she was to all that concerned the health of her "dear little ones." Nothing, for instance, could be more charming than the following details, which she sends to parents about their daughter :

"Tell Madame X. . . . that Miss Pauline is in splendid health. She is so rosy that they would not know her. Already she shows the same tendency to plumpness as the others. . . . She is growing strong. She has not had a day's illness since she has been here."

Mère Julie made it a duty for the mistresses to procure for their pupils recreative pleasures suitable to their age. She looked upon the cultivation of flowers as one of the best means of interesting and

Educational Ideals of

amusing children. At Namur the boarders each had a little garden to look after. They sowed their favourite plants, and tended them with assiduous care, watching them grow and gathering their little harvests. This pleasant relaxation, besides fostering in them a love of nature, made them healthy, and, alternating with games and walks in the country, helped to make the serious work in class more fruitful.

The intellectual education given in the schools under Mère Julie's direction was in keeping with the needs of the times. Programmes of study did not approach either in diversity or complexity to those of our day. This is proved by the Education Act, already quoted, which declares:—

1. Art 5. In every primary school, reading, writing, arithmetic, and the elements of republican ethics, shall be taught.

A further decree of the following month of the same year (1789) adds:—

Art 2. Girls shall be trained to ordinary useful manual work of various kinds.

That was what Mère Julie had taught in her classes, religion and Christian ethics naturally replacing republican ethics. She reverts constantly in her letters to the importance which the mistresses should attach to writing, spelling, grammar, reading, and arithmetic. She permits geography to be taught as an extra subject, where it is asked for. Her opinion is, that wise moderation is necessary to ensure the acquisition of knowledge.

"When young trees develop too much wood," she writes, "we take good care to prune them. We gain more by doing less."

She insists above all on sewing. Her Congregation being instituted for the poor, she considers it important to train the young girls to manual work which

Blessed Julie Billiart

will enable them to earn their living in the future. But her desire is that they should be brought up to useful work, and not to frivolities :

"We are not gathered together," she would say, "to teach our children all kinds of fashionable work." And again: "They must be taught to sew before learning fancy work."

It was not in the poor schools only that needlework was held in esteem. The boarders also were thoroughly well trained in this branch of education.

Esteem of
needlework.

"A woman ought to be able to do everything for herself," Julie said to them. "She should be ready, if necessary, to do without all service, and know how to make use of everything. If you are not obliged to work for yourselves, work for the poor. There are always unfortunate people who need help."

The mistresses taught their pupils all kinds of needlework, from the elements of sewing and cutting out, to "the covering of chairs and arm-chairs, and even Church work embroidered in gold and silver."

The Sisters of Notre Dame are faithful to the injunctions of their Foundress on this subject. They are "careful to teach their pupils useful work, such as sewing, darning, mending, etc. . . . They do not neglect fancy work, but for that they wait until the later years of the children's education, in order not to give too much time to it."

Little by little, however, as time went on, the Institute was obliged to open its schools to young girls of all classes of society. As a consequence, the syllabus of studies had to be extended and rendered more complete; and at the request of the parents, accomplishments were taught to the pupils. Divine Providence decreeing this extension of the work had admirably

Extension
of syllabus
of studies.

Educational Ideals of

provided for it, by giving to the humble Julie an assistant, highly educated and of high position in the world, whose acquaintance we have already made—Mademoiselle Françoise Blin de Bourdon—in religion Mère St Joseph. The unchanging attachment between these two noble souls recalls to our minds those touching friendships of which the history of the Church preserves the record, and which help us to realize the beauty and truth of the wonderful praise given in Scripture to that incomparable treasure, a faithful friend.

God is sometimes pleased to manifest the providential help which He extends to His saints, by giving it to them in the agreeable form of a truly devoted friend. Is not all Christianity itself at once both human and Divine ?

For over twenty years Julie Billiart and Françoise Blin thought and felt alike ; they shared the same sufferings, the same humiliations ; they were always animated by the same spirit, and, according to contemporaries, “ these two Mothers, so different in birth, education, and character, and even in appearance, were so completely the complement, the one of the other, that all agreed that God had made them for one another.”

Thanks to the memoirs of the first Sisters, and to the testimony of former pupils—documents preserved at the Mother House—these two pious Foundresses, whose names are always closely united in these precious records, are brought vividly before us ; and we can study them in their intercourse with the children from the following details, drawn largely from this source.

It is in one of these papers, too, that we find the list of subjects included in the programme of studies in the boarding school at Namur in Mère St Joseph’s time :

Blessed Julie Billiart

“Course of Studies, including Religion, Sacred History, Church History, French Language and Literature, Arithmetic and Book-keeping, general History, Geography, and outlines of Astronomy, Needlework—plain and fancy. Foreign languages, and—as accomplishments—Drawing and Music. Chemistry, Physics, and Natural Science were not in those days in the syllabus for young girls, but we knew quite enough to look after household matters and to bring up a family. And if, through reverse of fortune, poverty became our lot, the cultivation of our talents, and the knowledge which we had acquired, provided us with resources which enabled us to make an honest living.”

Programme
of studies
in Namur
boarding
school in
Mère St
Joseph's
time.

The following testimony of a former pupil completes this brief sketch of intellectual education, as it was conceived by the Foundresses of the Institute of Notre Dame.

“The studies were perfectly graded and organized; and if the learning was not as extensive as now, it was not less thorough and solid than modern instruction.” Less was known, but perhaps it was better known; the mistresses sought to train up intelligent, rather than learned, women.

School organization in Blessed Julie's time was more simple than at present, the apparatus less complex, the distribution of time less laborious. Nevertheless, it was no easy task for the mistresses to arouse emulation amongst their pupils and to procure for them the requisites for their advancement in the different branches of instruction. Elementary textbooks suitable for beginners were very scarce, and those in existence were too dear. Many notes, now readily procurable, had then to be laboriously copied and dictated. But zeal always finds means,

School
organization
under
Mère Julie.

Educational Ideals of

and the work was helped on by the sisterly charity shown by the members of the different communities. The primitive methods adopted at the opening of the first school in Amiens in 1806 would not stand much chance of success in modern times. The Foundress sent a novice and a postulant, provided with a little bell, into the neighbouring streets, to announce that the Sisters of Notre Dame had just opened a free school for the little girls of the locality. We know with what a response their appeal was greeted.

At the opening of classes Mère Julie preferred to have only a small number of children. Experience had taught her that it is much more difficult to establish wise law and order when large numbers present themselves at the outset. It is her wish, that from the first the mistresses should insist upon the order and silence necessary for progress :

" If they speak too loud, if they are too rough with the children, things will never go well," she says.

Whilst on a journey to Bordeaux the Foundress writes :

" The little girls in Bordeaux are very quiet. There is not a sound in the big classes, which are
(a) Quiet and order. all quite full. The mistresses speak in a very low tone, or scarcely at all. They have signals, as at Amiens. Do not, I beg of you, my dear daughters, get into a habit of speaking too loud. It may be difficult to avoid at first, but remember that everything depends upon the beginning."

" The really most important thing in class is a spirit of order : to be able to manage a class well is worth more than gold."

But order is possible only on condition that we follow exactly a well-thought-out method. Mère Julie requires " this fidelity in keeping to school rules," without which, she says, " there is only a muddle."

Blessed Julie Billiart

"The mistresses must make their pupils treat them with respect" and firmly establish their authority, or rather, "not their own ^{(b) Respect for the teacher.} authority, but that which the good God has entrusted to them." It will not then be "a weight which crushes," and which proceeds rather from a stern character than from true zeal for souls."

"We must not give way to weakness, especially before the children, for that would spoil everything. If nature claims her rights, we must do violence to ourselves at all costs."

"I do not say that you must be always displeased, even though you may have reason to be so; we must sometimes shut our eyes, not in the case of anything serious, but with regard to childish faults."

Nevertheless, when the occasion calls for it, they must be strict, within reasonable bounds.

Mère Julie herself, whom all knew to be goodness and kindness itself, "soon ^{(c) Strictness within bounds.} settled children who did not behave as they should."

It happened, relates one of her contemporaries, that at Namur, during the Foundress' absence, the boarders tried to dictate to their first mistress. On her return, Mère Julie, whom they only knew as kind, showed them that she was also strict. In a short time, and for ever, all attempts at misbehaviour ceased.

All the same, before taking the extreme measure of "making an example in a class," where it seemed necessary to do so, she advised the mistresses to "pray for the pupils in fault, to let the class make a general Communion." A teacher, she said, must have recourse to severity "whenever she recognizes that the good God requires it of her; she will then exercise it without passion, entirely for

Educational Ideals of

the children's good, and the good God will bless her, because He sees the right intention with which she acts."

But the dignity of the child must never be lost sight of in the exercise of authority. How often
(d) The dignity of the child. does Mère Julie repeat this recommendation :

"Above all things speak with respect to the children if you wish them to respect and love you. I beg this of you, for without it no good can be done. If I insist upon this, it is because I know the consequences that result from it."

This good Mother, whilst admitting that severity must sometimes be employed, much preferred to reward the children. She always
(e) Kindness preferable to severity. encouraged them, praised their smallest efforts, and promised them pictures and medals. She established in the schools all the various means of fostering emulation in use in our day—good marks, decorations, crosses for good conduct, prizes, crowns, etc. Each month she visited the different classes to bestow the rewards on the pupils who had merited them, and at the end of the year it gave her the greatest pleasure to distribute the prizes. Even during the time of the war she made great sacrifices in order not to deprive the children of the reward of their year's work.

"The most impartial justice governed this distribution : virtue and merit alone gained the palm
(f) Impartial justice. of victory ; and the mistresses, whilst encouraging a noble emulation amongst their pupils, were careful to guard against all pride or jealousy."

Then, as now, mistresses had often to deplore the repeated absences of their pupils, and we all know how this keeps the children back. Mère Julie encouraged her Sisters thus :

Blessed Julie Billiart

“ Be as particular as possible about exactitude, promise rewards to the pupils who attend well. Try to win the confidence of the children, ^(g) for then regular attendance will follow, ^{Exactitude.} little by little.”

At the present day no one questions the necessity of holidays and vacations. On the one hand constitutions are more delicate, more ^(h) ^{Holidays and vacations.} anæmic than formerly, while on the other hand programmes of studies have gradually become so overcrowded that overwork is always to be feared, for the teachers as well as for the scholars. It was not thus at the beginning of the nineteenth century, for school work was much more restricted, much less complicated, and in consequence much less fatiguing. General education was more harmonious, and so the school year could, without prejudice, be prolonged. This explains why Mère Julie was unwilling that holidays should be too frequent or vacations too long. At Namur the classes never closed for more than a fortnight after the distribution of prizes. All the same the Foundress herself realized that “ although we give them only a fortnight, the pupils take quite eighteen or twenty-four days. We do what we can to shorten the time, but it is never long enough, either for the parents or the children.”

Far above any intellectual education did Mère Julie place moral and religious training. ⁽ⁱ⁾ ^{Importance of religious training.} It was her own personal conviction—and she possessed the happy gift of making others share her conviction—“ that without religion there is no such thing as true happiness in the world.”

“ The knowledge of Christian Doctrine—that knowledge which is above all others true solid knowledge—which is to be preferred before all others,” is that which is the object of Julie’s special predilection.

Educational Ideals of

Religious lessons must be carefully prepared by the mistresses, and she advises them never to give an instruction to their pupils without having meditated beforehand on what they are going to say, because religious instruction is the most necessary thing for the children. The mistresses need not "preach" every time they feel inclined, no, but they should make sure that the children are thoroughly conversant with their duties to God, their neighbour and themselves—their indispensable duties, which every Christian must know, in order to be saved.

"Put these little souls in the way of salvation, that is the best sermon that you can give them."

Mère Julie was particularly insistent on certain points of doctrine—the goodness of God, what our Lord Jesus Christ did for man's salvation, the grief which we should feel at having offended so good a God, the importance of preparation for death, and the reception of the last Sacraments—so that, later on these children, as the Angels of their homes, should see to this great duty of charity when any one of the family was in danger of death. We must never tire of repeating these things, even a thousand times over, so that the children may know them.

In her instructions the saintly Foundress constantly came back to the consoling doctrine of God's love. How she loved to call Him "*the good God*"!

Two days before her death, the supreme lesson which she even then sent as a message to her dear children, was this:

"Tell them that I bless them, and that I beg of them to say always, in every circumstance of life, 'How good is the good God.'"

So well had she succeeded in making her pupils realize the truth of this saying that they were in the habit of writing it as a motto at the beginning of their class exercises, even long after the death of the saintly

Blessed Julie Billiart

Mother. When children learn thus to look upon God as a father, prayer does not present itself to them as a painful duty, which they will rejoice to set aside, as soon as they are free to act as they choose ; it becomes, on the contrary, a need of their hearts. The Institute of Notre Dame made it a point to direct children in the accomplishment of this primary duty of Christian life.

" The great devotions of Holy Church " were instilled into them, and the liturgical prayers, inspired by the Holy Spirit, were so explained to them that they were made to taste and appreciate their beauty and efficacy : God hears the prayers which He himself suggests to us. Assisting at Holy Mass, meditation, daily examination of conscience, frequent reception of the Sacraments, formed a part of their life in such a way as to render their piety both solid and impressive. At Namur the boarders formed the habit of approaching the Holy Table for the feast of their patron saints, the anniversaries of their baptism and first Communion, and the death of any of their relatives. " We should celebrate," they were told, " by a fervent Communion, great events of our life, great graces, joyful as well as painful circumstances."

Thus they were taught from their tenderest years to rise towards God by gratitude, love, and submission. Religious practices, far from being simply on a par with all the other acts of life, or even, as too often happens, being shut up in a water-tight compartment, were a part of their very existence, and marked it with the seal of true Christianity. But the children were in no way constrained to a multiplicity of religious practices. Prayers, to be good, need not be long, and Mère Julie never forgot that she was dealing with little girls " who easily tire of anything."

" You must have a talent," she advises, " for making them wish, themselves, for those things which are good."

Educational Ideals of

"You ask me," she writes to a Superior, "if I think that the children should go to Church at four o'clock when they come out of school to make a visit. I certainly should wish it very much. . . . But I think it is better to wait . . . before long, it may be said, that you are turning the children's heads with piety."

"Everything does not lie in following the promptings of zeal, but in being prudent. In an establishment, founded for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, one cannot be too careful as to prudence, wisdom, discretion, in all one's dealings with others.

(j) Prudence
and
discretion.

"During the war of 1814 the boarders had begged to be allowed to join the Sisters in offering special prayers to God for the cessation of this public scourge; the prudent Superior granted the permission at first, but later withdrew it, for fear of wearing out their devotion."

Mère Julie, whose counsel was "to take a broad view of everything religious," did not at all wish to turn out little devotees, but good Christians, "who would be useful in society, great souls capable of persevering in well-doing."

In order to achieve this result she founded the whole work of moral training on a spirit of faith, a sense of duty. She would have nothing little, nothing superficial in education. From the very beginning she wished the pupils to learn the text of the Gospel. How often did she not repeat to her Sisters:

"If you form hearts on the teaching of the Gospel, you will make souls become great."

The Foundress planted in all hearts, no matter how young, a spirit of faith. Following her example, Mère St Joseph constantly repeated, in her instructions to the mistresses, the same exhortations:

(k) Spirit
of faith.

"Do not make little of their vocation as Christians,"

Blessed Julie Billiart

she wisely said ; “ instil into them the great Gospel maxims ; do not be afraid to show them in all its austere beauty the morality taught by our Lord. Train up strong women. Let the foundations of their life be laid on solid, practical faith, preach devotedness to God and our neighbour, as well by your conduct as by your words. . . . Save society and family life from useless members. . . . Everything big ! . . . Pave the way for lives of devotedness and fruitfulness.”

There was no hesitation, therefore, in speaking to the children of mortification and sacrifice :

the great principles of abnegation and con-^{(1) Mortifica-}
tempt of the world and its false maxims, tion and
were instilled into them. Trained them- sacrifice.

selves, by the severe lessons of the French Revolution, the first Mothers gave their pupils a foresight of the future which called for courageous souls. The portrait of the valiant woman, as she is depicted for us in the Scriptures, often provided them with a text for their pious discourses. That was the model proposed for imitation to these young girls, the wives and mothers of the future. And in order to develop in the children in an effectual and lasting way the sense of personal dignity, the Mothers brought them up with a high ideal of Christian chastity.

“ Above all things, train up virtuous and pure hearts,” repeated Mère Julie to her religious. And Mère St Joseph, in her turn, said also :—

“ Purity is the strength of the heart, and the serenity of the soul ; it is purity which constitutes true Christian dignity ; it gives a divine impress and commands respect. On approaching a pure soul, one feels instinctively that God dwells therein.”

One of the chief recommendations given to the class mistresses was “ to give to all their teaching a moral and religious stamp.” Thus only would they “ reach

Educational Ideals of

the soul of the child, unknown to itself, and be able to do it an immense amount of good."

To make the period of education "a real apprenticeship for the life which they would have to lead later on," these young girls were not merely given, in oral instruction, "a high idea of the mission of a Christian woman," they were introduced to the practice of Christian virtues, special stress being laid on the accomplishment of "the duties of their state—obedience, respect for their teachers, and exactitude in performing their daily tasks in class."

They were also taught to appreciate the joy of giving to others. Mère Julie had introduced the custom of having garments made for the poor by the paying pupils, but their alms had to be taken from the slender resources of pocket-money. At Christmas the boarders themselves dressed the poor children in these garments. This charitable custom has been faithfully preserved in the Institute of Notre Dame, and all the former boarders agree in saying that their own joy in this touching little ceremony was far greater than that of their little protégées.

In times of public calamity ardent exhortations were not wanting to stir up these young hearts to generosity. The children joyfully made sacrifices in order to assist those in suffering. They were thus taught to forget self in times of trial, and to give themselves to others with the spontaneity of a truly Christian spirit of Faith. This virile training was harmoniously combined with the cultivation of social qualities in accordance with the station in life to which the pupils belonged. The mistresses familiarized them with that true politeness, that amiable simplicity, that distinction of manner, which are the reflection of virtue in a Christian woman.

Blessed Julie Billiart

But that the good seed may grow in young hearts and produce lasting fruits, the thorns which threaten to choke it must be eradicated. ^(o) Correction of faults.

The children's faults must be corrected—a delicate and arduous task—which calls for much tact and patience on the part of the teacher. To succeed in this work the confidence of the pupils must be secured by the affection of the teacher.

"Children readily give their confidence," says Mère Julie, "but they also readily withdraw it, and what can we do for them if once they turn against us?"

The prudent Superior frequently insisted on the necessity of "going slowly with souls, following the spirit of the good God, which is a spirit of patience—of infinite patience."

The mistresses to whom Mère Julie spoke were young and ardent, and their zeal might easily have been immoderate if she had not frequently reminded them that the training ^(p) Moderation and patience. of a child's soul is not the work of a day.

She unwearingly repeated to them:

"I ask the good God to give you patience with your children; all will go well in time; remember the saying: 'Leave well alone.' Certainly, be very exact in all duties. That is according to the good God's plan; but after all, things progress very slowly with poor children of Adam, such as we are."

"On our side we must neglect nothing, but we must not expect that things will come right in a single day."

"Too much severity is not good in the training of young people. Later on, in order not to be like you, they will fall into the opposite extreme. Be very attentive to what I say, for I know from experience that it is of the utmost importance. A miserly father begets a prodigal son!"

"To exact too much from certain souls spoils everything."

Educational Ideals of

“Extreme measures never succeed with anyone.”

“Do not find fault with the children until you have thought it well over before the good God, for we need never expect *them* to respond to the extent of *our* desires for their good. Certain things may seem reasonable to us, but *they* do not see with the same eyes as *we*, who seek only their welfare. Be patient with those who give you trouble, and the good God will accept it as very meritorious.”

Exposing the real motive of excessive exigency the Foundress adds :

“We will bear nothing, either ourselves, or from anyone—that is the truth.”

Everyone knows that vanity and giddiness are natural to young girls. In order to put the least tendency to these faults under the yoke of simplicity, Mère Julie established from the very beginning that the boarders should wear a uniform. This was a wise precaution against a danger which is so often the ruin of families and brings about the loss of souls. The vigilant Superior feared that the parents themselves would compromise the great work of the education of their children. In her opinion “what is very often the cause that a little girl does not get on with her studies, is this—her parents spoil her.”

In the work of training confided to an educator the co-operation of the pupil is an indispensable element of success. As Mère Julie says :—
(g) The-co-operation of the pupil. “Unless you have the goodwill of the child, you can do nothing at all for her education.”

We must, whenever possible, “talk reason to them, piety—yes—but let us begin with reason. It is the most useful thing in the world for finding a way into their hearts.”

To ensure their moral training a wise and watchful superintendence must come to the aid of the child's

Blessed Julie Billiart

natural weakness, and Blessed Julie considered this one of the greatest responsibilities of a teacher.

In the early days of the Institute this duty was sometimes very difficult, on account of the small number of Sisters to do everything. ^(r) Watchful supervision without suspicion. All the same, the Foundress insists.

"I know quite well," she writes to a Superior, "that it is not too easy to keep a constant watch over your boarders, but I am afraid that there may not be enough supervision. . . . It is our most important duty. . . . I beg of you all to fulfil it."

She, who was always so kind, could show herself severe towards the mistresses who failed in this point. At the same time, she could not bear them to be suspicious, as the following extract from her correspondence bears witness :

"My daughter, they tell me that someone always remains in the room with your boarders when their parents come to see them. That should never be done, my good daughter—they might be so many slaves! That must never be done in our houses ; at least, except in very extraordinary cases. No doubt you did not know, but you should ask about these things. They are of the greatest importance."

Mère Julie was exceedingly watchful to shield the children from all sources of evil. She constantly recommended the Superiors to ^(s) Sources of evil. be very careful not to receive into their boarding schools any child who might spoil the others. She gives them an example of an educational establishment (not of our Institute), a house which was "most exemplary in everything, where a single child influenced twenty others, who had to be dismissed at once."

Her vigilance was also active in regard to reading. According to her opinion, the mistresses should not allow the pupils to read novels or other works of pure

Educational Ideals of

fiction, which are much more likely to do harm than to be instructive, for young people.

"It is like trying to gather figs from thistles," said Mère Julie, "when the fruit-laden tree is near at hand. . . . The only thing that the children derive from it, as a rule, is an inordinate taste for this kind of story, and a great disgust for anything sensible or the least bit serious."

We cannot better conclude this account of moral training according to the mind of Blessed Julie than

by quoting the following lines from the
(t) **Testimony** testimony of former pupils, who after forty
of former or fifty years of a fruitful life, attribute
pupils. it entirely to the sound training received

in the boarding school at Namur under the two first Mothers.

"I have outlived all those whom I loved," writes one elderly lady. "My old age is a sad and suffering one ; but from the spirit of faith, and confidence in God, and in His love, learnt at the Convent, I draw the necessary courage and resignation to abandon myself peacefully to the holy and adorable Will of God."

And another :

"It is to my happy childhood spent at the Notre Dame boarding school that I look back with the greatest pleasure. When the heart is young and fresh, everything makes an impression, and during that period of my existence I gathered together many great and important lessons. . . . I like to think that from their place in heaven the saintly Mothers who brought me up see how deeply grateful I am. After God, I owe all the happiness of my life to them."

"We did not then understand," says a third, "all that they told us about the life of faith ; but later on these words of wisdom and strength came back to us, and now I still draw my soul's nourishment from them."

"I must say it, to the praise of the Sisters of Notre

Blessed Julie Billiart

Dame," testifies a valiant mother of a family, " if God has been pleased to send me a fair measure of trials, He has provided me in still greater measure with all the treasures of Christian resource in the solid education which I received at Namur. Without that life animated by the spirit of faith to which we were trained, without that solid teaching on the obligation of carrying our cross after Our Lord, without that grip of Christian hope, I should have despaired many a time in my life ; but in every hour of trial our school instructions came back to my mind, and with a heart resigned and confident, I drank of the cup of suffering."

CHAPTER III

THE WORK OF BLESSED JULIE

“Ah! how good is the good God!”

MORE than one hundred years have elapsed since Julie Billiart, after having established her Institute on solid foundations, passed to her eternal reward, in the bosom of her God, whose goodness she had so continuously glorified.

Growth and spread of the Congregation. The century has advanced, bringing with it, on the one hand, many discoveries and much progress, carrying away, on the other, more than one enterprise, which has given promise of long duration. The work of the humble Cuvilly maiden remains, and has attained marvellous dimensions. A persecution, prompted by a narrow outlook, had threatened, during the lifetime of the Foundress, to confine her Congregation within the limits of a single diocese; and yet, at the present day, it is spread abroad not only throughout Belgium, the land of its adoption, but also in England, Scotland, the United States, Belgian Congo, and South Africa.

At the beginning of 1914 the Congregation counted 3306 members, distributed in 113 communities and teaching 95,268 children. The Institute is engaged in all grades of education: kindergarten, primary, secondary, and even higher, for besides some commercial schools, it has opened at Washington, U.S.A., a University College for girls, which is in no way inferior to the establishments

Blessed Julie Billiart

of a similar nature belonging to the State. Desirous of providing teachers, thoroughly well equipped for their mission, the Sisters of Notre Dame have established in Belgium, England, and Scotland training colleges, primary and secondary, which send forth each year hundreds of Catholic teachers. Besides this, without including Sunday schools, in which are assembled some 40,000 pupils, they also give instruction to about 82,000 adults, this chiefly in the Protestant countries, where the priests send female neophytes to the Sisters to be prepared for the reception of the Sacraments. They direct a great many Confraternities and Sodalties, in which numbers of women and girls of all ages and ranks meet every week to be strengthened in the spiritual life, so that their Christianity may be living and fruitful. To prepare the pupils for the duties of their future life, the Institute has opened many schools of domestic training, workrooms for sewing and cutting out, and schools for lacemaking. But, in the words of their Rule itself, the desire of the daughters of Blessed Julie is always to "devote all their labours to the poor of the most abandoned places," and for this reason they shelter in their establishments orphans, deaf-mutes, and other unfortunate children, and devote themselves, on the far-off shores of the Congo and Orange Rivers, to the civilization of that country, which, watered by the blood of so many missionaries, cannot fail to produce fruit.

This cursory glimpse gives us an idea of the rapid extension of the work, and at the same time compels us to recognize the marvellous adaptability with which the Foundress had endowed it, by the breadth of her views and the wisdom of her Rules. For all the Notre Dame foundations, from the kindergarten to Trinity College, University of Washington, from the Congolese chimbecks of the natives to the boarding schools

Educational Ideals of

for young girls of the upper class, all are inspired by Mère Julie's spirit, and all are now in working, because of the first vigorous impulse which she gave to her Institute.

Certainly we must attribute this wonderful result primarily to the blessing of God, which has upheld the Congregation in the midst of the downfall and ruin of which every century is a witness ; but surely we may be allowed to recognize, in the very principles which guided Blessed Julie, the secret of the survival and of the prosperity of her Institute.

Her educational principles are as simple as they are lofty. They can easily be reduced to three Educational principles of groups, relating respectively to education, Blessed the teacher, and the child. Julie.

Education has for its ultimate aim to direct the child heavenwards. It is therefore according to the beautiful saying of St Denis, " the most divine of all divine works, since it labours with God for the salvation of souls."

It was from this high standpoint of faith that Blessed Julie looked upon it. According to her, to educate a child is to start it on the road to salvation. This she does by providing it with all the helps which will enable it to tread with firm footsteps this uphill way, so often rough and dark and difficult to climb, in order that the child, persevering, may follow it to the very end. Let education apply itself to securing for the body that vigour, health, and manual skill, which are such powerful aids to the well-being of the individual, of the family, and of society at large ; let it open out to the intelligence the vast horizon of human sciences ; let it train the mind to the exquisite enjoyment of literature and of the fine arts—that is what it should do ; but let it always remember, while fulfilling its task, that it must see farther and higher than this

Blessed Julie Billiard

world ; and that all these means must be subordinated to the great end—man's final destiny.

The teacher has then a divine mission to fulfil. Whilst J. J. Rousseau said : " To train men one must be more than a man," we have heard Blessed Julie exclaim, " One needs to be God to understand the greatness of such a work ! " And what a sublime ideal of a teacher worthy of the name did this saintly Mother put before herself ! Chosen by God as intermediary between Him and those little souls, fresh from His creative hands, the Catholic mistress must in her dealings with His creatures strive to reproduce in her own person the divine characteristics. Everything in her must contribute to the training of the child—her dignified bearing, her affable, yet restrained speech, her quiet and deliberate movements. These will bear witness, that before wishing to teach others she is mistress of herself. They will be an ever-present example of politeness, distinction, amiability, and self-control. The thorough and varied knowledge with which her studies have provided her will enable her to teach the sciences to her pupils, at the same time that her practical judgment, enlightened by educational training, will fit her to choose the best and most effectual methods in her teaching.

Her strength of character will ensure to her an almost paternal authority, whereby to rule her pupils ; whilst her kindness of heart will suggest to her the many little tendernesses of a mother, which will make obedience to her a pleasure. Thanks to a wise balance, she will be firm without rigidity, indulgent without weakness, pliable without inconsistency. Loving the children confided to her care with a deep but supernatural affection, the labours, sufferings, and difficulties incidental to their training will be as nothing to her. Her own studies and the work of her own improvement, serious preparation of her lessons, correction of

Educational Ideals of

exercises, supervision which must be constant and intelligent, but never suspicious or nagging—to all these she must apply herself. She must wage a continual but calm and passionless warfare against the faults of childhood and youth. In fine, the whole life of a teacher must belong to the pupils.

Her own sincere piety and the intercourse which she holds with God, all tend to the advantage of the children under her care. In her instructions, it is God that she gives to them, as she does also by her example. It is towards God that she directs their steps. God alone can teach her the value of that exquisite work of His hands, the soul of a child, and can give her the respect, tact, and gentleness which she ought to possess in order to train it.

Yes, *the child*, above all else, according to Blessed Julie, is a soul “in which we must labour to form Jesus,” a soul—that is the greatest, the noblest, the most interesting thing on earth; a mind which must be enlightened in the way of truth, a will which must be trained to good; a heart gifted with the power of loving, which must be turned to that which is both good and beautiful, alone worthy of love. The child is the simplest of beings, one whose ingenuous confidence, as yet ignorant of the deceptions of the world, is ever ready to give itself completely to anyone who manifests an affectionate interest.

A child is an attractive and engaging little being, on whom one cannot but lavish tenderness and affection; but the teacher must remember, that it is also an apprentice in training for life, and therefore it must be loved with a sincerity which will teach it to see this life as it really is, this life which perhaps holds in store for it much that is unforeseen and which must be regarded, “neither as a pleasure nor a burden, but as a duty.”

If these high principles, which have their foundation

Blessed Julie Billiart

in God, and which are unchangeable as God, are safeguarded, then according to Blessed Julie's broad and wise ideas, physical and intellectual development may be carried as far as time, place, and circumstances require.

Children, whose moral training has been thus ensured, will go through life, no matter what its vicissitudes may be, head erect, heart courageous, soul serene, always looking towards the goal of their earthly pilgrimage.

A great philosopher has said :

“ If education were reformed it would reform the world.”

May we not add :

“ And education would be reformed if it were based on the thoughts of the saints ? ”

What, for example, could not be done by a generation of men and women who had been brought up from childhood in a truly Christian spirit, and who, to carry out the vocation which Providence has assigned to them, could, like Blessed Julie, surmount all obstacles and repeat with her, whether in suffering or in unalloyed happiness, strong in Faith, settled in Hope, and in the filial confidence of love :

“ Ah ! how good is the good God.”

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